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India-U.S.: Major Arms Transfers and Military Exercises

Since 2008, defense trade has emerged as a major pillar of the U.S.-India security partnership, and bilateral military exercises across all services are now routine. The U.S. Congress designated India a “Major Defense Partner” in 2016, conveying certain defense trade and security cooperation privileges. U.S.-India security relations became a high-profile aspect of U.S. Asia policy during the first Trump and Biden Administrations. The Biden Administration launched new bilateral technology-sharing and defense coproduction initiatives with India that the second Trump Administration has vowed to build upon. Legislation in the 118th Congress would have enhanced India’s eligibility for arms sales. The 119th Congress may wish to consider adjusting U.S. laws and regulations to shape U.S.-India defense trade. Future arms sales to and/or collaboration on advanced military technologies with India may require congressional approval.

Major Arms Transfers

According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) data, India has been the world’s leading importer of major arms (by value) since 1950, with purchases exceeding \$136 billion through 2024. For the period 2008-2024, India accounted for 10% of global arms imports—\$48 billion worth—just ahead of #2 Saudi Arabia. India’s current defense arsenal is heavily stocked with Russian-supplied equipment. Since 2008, about 59% of India’s defense imports (by value) have come from Russia; other top suppliers include France (12%), the United States (10%), and Israel (9%). The U.S. government has actively encouraged India to reduce its dependence on Russian-origin defense articles, and India’s suppliers are becoming more diverse: for the period 2020-2024, 36% of India’s imports came from Russia.

Prior to 2008, U.S.-India defense trade was relatively limited, involving modest U.S. sales of naval helicopters and counterbattery radars in the mid-2000s. In 2007, the United States also provided India with an amphibious transport dock ship under the U.S. Excess Defense Articles program. The combined cost of these three deals was roughly \$233 million. India has since contracted for at least \$24 billion worth of U.S.-origin defense articles, purchasing items through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and the Direct Commercial Sales processes. Major U.S. sales since 2008 include transport and maritime aircraft; transport, maritime, and attack helicopters; anti-ship missiles; and howitzers, among others. India is now the largest operator of C-17 Globemaster heavy transport and P-8I Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft outside of the United States.

In late 2024, Congress was notified of a possible FMS to India of 30 advanced radio systems and other support equipment worth an estimated \$1.17 billion for India’s Seahawk naval helicopters, with a goal of upgrading India’s

anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities. Other proposed sales include ASW sonobuoys, turboprops for indigenously produced Indian combat aircraft, and additional MK 54 torpedoes, Hellfire anti-tank missiles, and Excalibur guided artillery rounds. The United States also offers India advanced combat aircraft such the F-21 Fighting Falcon and potentially the fifth-generation F-35 Lightning II.

The United States and India launched a bilateral Defense Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X) in 2023 to expand strategic technology and defense industrial cooperation (this was redubbed as INDUS Innovation in early 2025). At the time, Ohio-based General Electric issued an unprecedented proposal to jointly produce its advanced F414 jet engine in India. Discussions on coproduction of Stryker infantry combat vehicles and Javelin anti-tank missiles are ongoing. India also has approved procurement of 31 armed MQ-9B SeaGuardian and SkyGuardian unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) built by California-based General Atomics for as much as \$4 billion.

Major U.S. Arms Purchases, 2000-2024

(Deliveries completed unless otherwise noted.)

Air

- 28 AH-64 Apache combat helicopters (25 delivered)
- 1,774 AGM-114 Hellfire anti-tank missiles (1,454 delivered)
- 600 WGU-59 air-to-surface rockets (25 delivered)
- 245 Stinger portable surface-to-air missiles
- 12 APG-78 Longbow combat helicopter radars
- 15 CH-47 Chinook transport helicopters
- 13 C-130 Hercules transport aircraft
- 11 C-17 Globemaster III heavy transport aircraft
- 2 MQ-9A Reaper UAVs (two-year lease in 2020)
- 512 CBU-97 guided bombs
- 640 JDAM and GBU-39 guided glide bombs (0 delivered)
- 249 turboprop aircraft engines (48 delivered)

Sea

- 1 Austin-class amphibious transport dock
- 24 MH-60R Seahawk naval helicopters (12 delivered)
- 12 P-8I Poseidon patrol and ASW aircraft
- 78 MK 54 ASW torpedoes (62 delivered)
- 6 S-61 Sea King ASW helicopters
- 63 Harpoon anti-ship missiles
- 18 naval gas turbines (4 delivered)

Land

- 12 Firefinder counterbattery radars
- 145 M-777 towed 155 mm howitzers
- 1,400 M-982 Excalibur guided artillery shells

- 145,400 SIG Sauer SIG716 assault rifles

Bilateral Military Exercises

Since 2002, the United States and India have been increasing the scope, complexity, and frequency of combined military exercises, with an emphasis on maritime security and interoperability. India now conducts more exercises and personnel exchanges with the United States than with any other country. (See italicized names below.)

Yudh Abhyas (Army): The 20th edition of the premier bilateral ground forces exercise, held in India in September 2024, was the largest ever. Elements of the U.S. Army's 11th Airborne Division participated in exercises held at the battalion level (roughly 600 troops from each army), along with brigade-level mission planning.

Vajra Prahar (Army Special Forces): U.S. and Indian Special Forces soldiers have held 15 joint exercises since 2010, and hundreds of U.S. Special Forces soldiers have attended India's Counter-Insurgency Jungle Warfare School. The most recent edition of this platoon-level exercise was held in Idaho in November 2024.

Cope India (Air Force): First held in 2004 as a fighter jet training exercise in northern India, in 2018 the two countries' air forces relaunched these exercises after a nine-year hiatus. Cope India 2023 was the sixth and largest iteration ever, and included the participation of a U.S. Air Force B-1B bomber and F-15 combat aircraft.

Tiger Triumph (tri-service): In 2019, U.S. and Indian forces conducted their first-ever tri-service exercise in the Bay of Bengal to develop interoperability for large-scale joint and combined humanitarian and disaster relief (HADR) operations. A third iteration was held in March 2024 and involved elements of a U.S. Marine Expeditionary Unit and an Indian Army mechanized infantry battalion, along with U.S. and Indian aircraft and naval vessels.

Other bilateral exercises include ***Tarkash*** joint ground force counterterrorism exercises involving U.S. Special Forces and India's National Security Guard troops, and ***Sangam*** naval special forces exercises, which bring together companies of U.S. Navy SEALs and the Indian Navy's Marine Commando Force.

Multilateral Military Exercises

Malabar (Navy): The United States and India inaugurated Malabar in 1992 as a bilateral naval exercise. Japan joined in 2014. Australia's participation began in 2020, bringing together naval forces from all four of the "Quad" diplomatic network countries for the first time since HADR operations conducted following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Malabar's 28th edition, the fifth to include all Quad navies, was held in the Bay of Bengal in October 2024. Participating Indian forces included destroyers, frigates, submarines, and combat aircraft. The U.S. Navy sent a destroyer and a P-8 aircraft.

Rim-of-the-Pacific (RIMPAC, Navy): The biennial RIMPAC reportedly is the world's largest maritime exercise. A 29th edition was held near Hawaii in June 2024 with the participation of 29 countries and 40 surface ships, including an Indian Navy frigate.

Milan (Navy): India hosts this biennial Bay of Bengal exercise, first held in 1994 with the forces of five Southeast Asian nations. The U.S. Navy first participated in 2022. The 12th edition in February 2024 was the largest ever with 50 nations and the inclusion of a U.S. Navy destroyer.

Cutlass Express (Navy): In 2019, the Indian Navy began participating in exercises held near Djibouti and sponsored by the Pentagon's Africa Command. The February 2025 edition of "East Africa's premier maritime exercise" took place near Seychelles and included units from more than 20 countries, India among them.

La Perouse (Navy): A biennial Indian Ocean exercise sponsored by France brought together elements from nine navies in February 2025, including a U.S. Navy littoral combat ship and an Indian Navy destroyer.

Sea Dragon (Navy): The fifth edition of this annual ASW theater exercise was held near Guam in March 2025 and included forces from the Quad (among them U.S. and Indian P-8 aircraft), plus South Korea.

Pitch Black (Air Force): Australia hosts this biennial low-light warfare exercise, held most recently mid-2024 with forces from 20 countries. Contingents of U.S. and Indian combat, transport, and tanker aircraft were among them.

Red Flag (Air Force): The U.S. Air Force conducts aerial combat exercises with units from allied and partner countries several times each year in the United States. Indian combat, transport, and tanker aircraft joined in 2008, 2016, and the June 2024 edition in Alaska.

Other Notable Defense Cooperation

India became a full member of the U.S.-commanded, Bahrain-based **Combined Maritime Forces** in 2023. This multinational naval partnership has 46 members and five Joint Task Forces focused on counter-narcotics, counter-smuggling, and counter-piracy. India's Defense Exhibition (**DefExpo**) is a biennial showcasing of Indian defense wares. The October 2022 edition was the 12th and largest ever, attracting participants from 75 countries, including the United States, and more than 1,300 companies. **Aero India** is a biennial air show held since 1996 in Karnataka and organized by India's Ministry of Defense. Reportedly Asia's largest air show, the February 2025 iteration saw the United States display many of its most advanced military aircraft. Numerous U.S. defense companies participated, as did senior U.S. officials and military officers. Reports suggest that DefExpo and Aero India may henceforth be combined into a single "mega industry event."

Selected Legislation in the 118th Congress

S. 2096 and **H.R. 4312** would have enhanced the eligibility of India for Foreign Military Sales and exports under the Arms Export Control Act.

Note: Arms purchase listings are sourced to SIPRI with further inputs from the U.S. Departments of Defense and State.

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